

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH U.S. ARMY COLONEL TIM MCATEER, INFANTRY, COMMANDER 2ND BRIGADE, 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION, VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: LESSONS LEARNED AND 2ND BCT COMMANDER'S PERSPECTIVE SINCE ASSUMING COMMAND IN HAITI TIME: 10:00 A.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2010

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COL. MCATEER: Good morning. Yeah, it's McAteer. Close enough. And I've heard them all before. My name is Tim McAteer. I'm the commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Quick background: The brigade deployed, as most of you know, to Haiti, on the 13th of January is when they started to deploy. And the deployment went through about the 24th to close the entire brigade of about 3100 paratroopers finally on the ground by the 24th of January. The earthquake was on the 12th. Our first troop of cavalry was on the ground on the 13th.

Interestingly enough, the brigade was postured for this mission as part of the Global Response Force as the division-ready brigade for the 82nd Airborne Division. But it's the Army's component of the JFCOM Global Response Force, which included a lot of the sister service elements that participated in operations down here with us.

The purpose of Global Response Force, there's about six missions, but the -- one of which is HA, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, prepared to execute short-notice contingency operations. The brigade itself was actually at Fort Bragg. We assumed the GRF on the 9th of June, 2009, and have been in alert posture for any contingency operation.

The brigade was training. The first call came in at about zero-five (5:00) in morning to deploy the lead element. They redeployed back to Fort Bragg from a training area to the north and were at Pope Air Force Base, which is contiguous to Fort Bragg if you're familiar with that area within five hours of the first call, awaiting on aircraft and started deployment in the afternoon/evening of the 13th.

We've been executing kind of phased operations with the Joint Task Force Haiti started out with an immediate humanitarian assistance

disaster-relief operations, everything from security to delivering humanitarian aid. We've transitioned a bit -- went through the World Food program, food surge one and two where we provided security and assistance to NGOs and the United Nations elements as they distributed tons of food, water to the displaced personnel, folks that lost their homes in the earthquake, who are living primarily in IDP camps. But we have facilitated a lot of that -- had a huge effect on the population with that as well.

We represent one small piece of DOD's contribution to the fight here, or to the operation here. And we are a supporting command. And brigade itself is almost supporting to two elements. You know, security in Haiti is the responsibility primarily of the government of Haiti and then the MINUSTAH, which is the United Nations' mission to Haiti. That's their mandate.

Immediately after the earthquake, both the government and MINUSTAH suffered setbacks. You know, the Brazilian forces lost 18 soldiers here. Their headquarters were destroyed. Their communications were in disarray. So they were having some trouble getting their feet under themselves. And so we were able to fill that void. But since the beginning, they have been the lead for security and we have been the supporting element. And we are supporting element to USAID and State who is the lead federal agency, state being the lead and their action arm being USAID on the ground here.

So that's kind of my opening statement. We continue to execute operations here. Portions of the brigade have redeployed. I'd be glad to talk about that. And I'm available and open for your questions.

LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Thank you, sir. While you were talking, someone joined us. Could I get your name please? Q It's John Doyle from 4GWar.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, John, so much. Chuck, you were first in the line. Go ahead.

Q Good morning, Colonel. Chuck Simmons from America's North Shore Journal. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today.

Of much of the brigade -- I don't want to call it infrastructure -- equipment, the trucks, the Humvee, the mess facilities came with the brigade? And have you been uploaded in certain categories of equipment for this particular mission?

COL. MCATEER: We deployed the initial forces primarily by air. And, you know, that's a -- there's a constraint on what you can bring by air on military aircraft. We focused on our effort on trucks just to move humanitarian assistance and some personnel around, but we were very limited on what we were able to bring up front.

That said, as we went through the deployment process, we then were able to ship the majority of the brigade's equipment by sea. We

railed everything -- and it happened pretty quickly. We railed everything down to Jacksonville, and then they were barged down -- it's about a four-day steam down here into the port -- and then offloaded the majority of equipment.

So some of the larger equipment -- I mean, we came here very expeditionary, with limited vehicular equipment, command-and-control equipment, our tac equipment, everything to run our operation systems, some of our water-purification equipment. Those were the high-priority items. And then we followed on with the kitchens and some of the maintenance equipment and some of that larger stuff that would sustain us for a larger period of time came by sea.

Yes, the brigades, equipment and organization, what we had on hand was very sufficient for the operation that we executed. Anytime you enter an operation like this -- and this is what we do in the 82nd Airborne Division in this brigade as a contingency force -- we fully expect to enter the theater in expeditionary conditions -- very rough living for paratroopers and soldiers on the ground early on, but that's to be expected. And we slowly build that capacity.

But what we were able to get in on the ground helped us. It was exactly what we needed, and we really haven't had any major shortfalls in equipment that I've been able to see. It took a little time to get a couple of the boats here, but once they got here, the port operating facilities, luckily the ports were still functional. We were able to get everything downloaded and then into the operational environment. Over.

Q And were you bumped up in interpreters at all, or were you able to find some within the brigade? COL. MCATEER: Interesting enough, a call kind of went out. IN fact, a call came up from a lot of Haitian-American soldiers within the Army. I can't speak for the other services.

But within the Army, we were able to get our hands on many Haitian Americans who are serving within the Army, and they stepped forward and volunteered, and we pulled from across the Army.

My interpreter for the brigade was a sergeant major who was serving in Afghanistan as part of the IJC headquarters over there. He's from Haiti. Our second interpreter for the command group served in a sister brigade back at Fort Bragg. He happened to be on the rear detachment NCOIC. We had a chaplain's assistant from another post in the Army and she came forward. And then we had two or three Haitian Americans within the brigade who speak, most of them, three or four languages: English, French, Creole and then Spanish. It's pretty amazing.

So we've done okay. There have been some language barriers but there are enough even locals that we were able to hire after a quick screen -- some of our drivers and folks that we could hire on a day-to-day basis who spoke good enough English that could do interpretation for us down here.

Q Great. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, and thank you, Chuck. Dale, please go ahead.

Q Good morning, sir. This is Dale Kissinger from MilitaryAvenue.com.

I actually flew some of those D-17s and 130s that you guys took a ride on for a while. So I'm just curious about how many people you still have in Haiti, and if you expect a redeployment in the near future.

COL. MCATEER: Well, the conditions are such right now that a large portion of the brigade has redeployed to Fort Bragg. We currently have about 900 paratroopers left, and they are built around taskforce 2nd of the 325, augmented with an additional NP company, additional engineer assets. They've got tactical PSYOP teams, civil affairs teams and a few extra interpreters.

The majority of the brigade, as I said, because the conditions are such in the security environment, have redeployed to Bragg, and we will reestablish the GRF on the 1st of April. My headquarters element, the remainder of my headquarters element will redeploy within the next couple of days. Important note on that, though, is we are reestablishing the GRF, and if conditions warrant and we are asked to come back, ordered to come back, obviously that's well within our capabilities. So I think the JTF is well-postured with the forces that they have here and the brigade is postured to respond as required.

Q So you would basically call it a success story then that the security arrangements have improved to the point where you can be redeployed.

COL. MCATEER: Yeah. The interesting thing on security, when you look at the trends in security, it's been very, very calm throughout our stay here. We've had no incidents of -- security incidents at any of the distribution sites that our paratroopers were working at. There have been no acts of violence against American soldiers. There's been -- you saw some looting going on in very isolated cases, and often those were trucks that had broken down or were not properly secured in their movements.

You still have to maintain security, but that's against some criminal elements and not necessarily elements that are trying to destabilize the relief efforts that are going on. It's just opportunists. It's opportunity crime and time and places.

So, yes, I say very much so. You know, when the brigade arrived here, they -- the trend was kind of moving in the wrong direction with the potential for a huge humanitarian crisis in terms of the health issues, and we hadn't seen -- we didn't see huge security issues, but it was just primarily helping the government and MINUSTAH to get their feet back underneath them so that they could then provide for their people. And I think we did succeed in that matter greatly.

And then we carried on -- I mean, that initial phase -- one thing I didn't notice -- you know, I took command on the 9th of February. I was not the commander for the first couple of weeks here. When I arrived, I was pleasantly surprised at the level of calm that was -- I witnessed throughout the city and throughout Port-au-Prince, which is our primary area of operation.

So speaking for this area, yes, it was a great success. We kind of turned the tide. We gave -- we bought MINUSTAH the time they needed to get their feet back underneath them, the Haitian police. I mean, there were reports of close to 400 police killed within the Port-au-Prince area. You know, you can imagine that in any major city in the United States. It takes a while for those institutions to reestablish themselves.

So we filled that gap. They've got their feet underneath them now and they're starting to move forward and are able to provide their own security. Q Well, that's great. Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale. John, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Hi, Colonel. This is John Doyle with the 4GWar Blog. I appreciate the time you're taking to talk to me.

First off the bat, I got on board just a little bit late, and if you explained this already -- what does GRF stand for please?

COL. MCATEER: That's the Global Response Force. And it's the DOD's force that is designated for any kind of response mission. It could be domestic response or it could be for -- and one of the six approved missions or planning missions for the GRF is humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

And most of the forces that you saw down here, to include the Baton out of the Navy, the Carter Hall I believe was one of the other ships, the MEU that was down here, they were all components of the GRF as well as the air expeditionary wing that came down here from the Air Force. So it's an on-call force and it's prepared to execute these types of missions, and our brigade became part of the GRF on June of 2009.

Q Thanks so much. My apologies to everyone else if you've already -- and you, if you've already gone through that.

Along those lines -- when I did tune in you were talking about that your brigade was the division-ready brigade for the 82nd. And given what you just said about the GRF, what equipment do you bring -- since this was a humanitarian relief effort in the 82nd, as a combat unit, essentially, what do you leave behind and what do you take with you in terms of offensive equipment? I assume you don't come down completely unarmed because there is a security component.

But what do you leave behind and how difficult is it to separate yourself from all of that equipment in an expeditious way to get down for

a relief effort? And how easy is it to link back up with all of that equipment when you're redeployed.

COL. MCATEER: Well, we're in the 82nd. This brigade is an airborne brigade, which is a little bit different there are many brigades in the Army that can assume the role of the of the brigade combat team, the Army's component of the GRF. We in the 82nd have a forcible-entry capability, parachute assault into access-denied areas. That's one of the niche missions that we have. And it gives strategic reach with forcible-entry capability anywhere in the world, places that are beyond helicopter strike, range and things like that.

So we train consistently to do a parachute assault and basically we would have a small portion of that, dependent on the number of aircraft available would be devoted to heavy-drop platforms where we would drop in the critical pieces of equipment that we need. And normally that's your command and control, it's some of your heavier weapons that are Humvee-mounted, 50-cal, Mark 19s, TOW anti-tank missiles. Those are kind of baseline weapons that we have for the heavier weapons.

And then what you can carry on your body. Also, we normally can heavy drop -- and do heavy drop -- our 105s.

Now, we didn't need that equipment here, so what we were able to do back at Fort Bragg was reconfigure some of our priority vehicle listings and try to get more towards cargo-haul capability, and we flew that stuff in. We didn't drop it; we flew it in.

Interestingly enough, with Port-au-Prince Airport, if the airport had been rendered unusable or inoperable because of the earthquake, there's a very real possibility that we would have airdropped the paratroopers and just jumped in on the airfield, and then repaired it to start air-lands. The critical link is getting the air-land piece going, and as soon as you can start turning aircraft, you start building combat power inside the airhead. And that's kind of the model that we followed.

As time went on and military aircraft were augmented with civilian aircraft, our final troops deployed down on civilian aircraft -- I believe they were craft. I'm not sure that that was craft; they might have just been chartered. And then we got the rest of our equipment down on boat, and marrying up with it was no problem.

On the reverse side, we've redeployed a lot of our equipment already -- reversed route from here to Jacksonville -- Jacksonville by line-haul -- up to Fort Bragg. And it's been put into the Army's R4 general reset process. And, again, we prioritized our command and control, our medical, that type -- and our heavy weapons -- that equipment to be reset so that we can reassume GRF on the 1st of April. Does that answer your question?

Q Pretty much. I just wanted to just clarify. Is there anything -- you know, you said you reconfigured your platform so you

don't have your heavy weaponry with you. Is there anything you have on standby, like pallets of water or food or MREs that you can quickly bring into an issue like this, or does that have to be grab-and-go as you go along?

COL. MCATEER: No. I should have mentioned that up front. I mean, part of that initial push is always a heavy sustainment package on water, food and generally ammunition. In this case it was water, food and medical supplies. There were several containerized delivery systems which are multiple containers that are dropped out of the back of C-17s and 130s, which one of y'all are familiar with having flown those before.

The CDS bundles came in early. We did quite a bit of CDS. The reality though is the majority of the humanitarian assistance aid that comes here or got here, came by sea. And it was able to come in by multiple means, and now it's coming in by commercial vessels. The port is really operating I think at above capacity, pre-earthquake capacity. Same thing with the airport. We're getting a lot more flights in now.

So, yeah, we can reconfigure loads, and we do. We try to cover every contingency. You know, we normally look at a minimum of an 18-hour deployment sequence when we have time to reconsider. It's orchestrated chaos back at Fort Bragg as you push out, as you call forward capability. And we have a lot of contingency stockage and you can usually pick and choose.

I can tell you, we didn't run out of food or water from the military side, and we were able to get a lot of food and water in here quickly for the humanitarian assistance side, both by air and sea, so I think it worked out very well.

Q Thank you, sir.

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LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, and thank you, John.

We have about 10 minutes, or rather nine minutes before we wrap up today. So let's go around the horn one more time. Chuck, please go ahead.

Q Yeah. Colonel, recently I saw some pictures of your guys working with the Italians clearing some rubble. They had heavier equipment. Which of the foreign military have your guys been working with besides the Italian military? And how has the interface between all of the different groups worked out for the 82nd?

COL. MCATEER: The MINUSTAH forces that we've worked with primarily in our area of operations or our operational environment are resilient. There's two Brazilian battalions -- Jordanian. There's a Jordanian battalion and then a battalion from Nepal. Those are the Army forces. MINUSTAH, the U.N. mission, they are comprised of both military,

like Army forces, that do some security work, and then there's also the UNPOL, the police arm of MINUSTAH.

We have not partnered with the police, and we do not train the government of Haiti police. We do -- we assist them and we will work -- like distribution sites, there will be Haitian police, MINUSTAH forces and then U.S. forces. So we all work together on a daily basis. But in terms of partnering, it's more with those military forces. In terms of the Italian forces, that was an Italian engineer unit that was sent here as a response -- unilaterally and not part of MINUSTAH, and they did have some heavier equipment. And what occurred down there with the rubble and debris removal was a -- just a lot of good initiative on the part of our engineers, the Italian engineers. And really the heavy lifter of this was a corporation called CNE. It's a government state organization run by the government of Haiti that have a lot of big dump trucks and frontend loaders and things like that.

And those three entities came together in downtown Port-au-Prince and started clearing areas of civilians. And then this was after the initial HA portion and clearing out that rubble to open up the streets, commerce, and allow people access to some of the drainage facilities there so they can start clearing out the drainage. We were very concerned that the drainage patterns were so altered by rubble and debris that we would have some flooding issues as we get into the rainy season.

And then the follow up to that, the partnership with the MINUSTAH forces has been really remarkable with the Brazilians, the Jordanians and the guys from Nepal. Paratroopers, they see a common need with these elements. We go in there and put aside some of the cultural differences and get to know each other and get the job done.

And I'll also mention that another great thing that came out of this mission was the nongovernmental organization relations that we built. Catholic Relief Services, World Food Program, World Vision, Samaritan's Purse -- I mean, the list goes on and on.

And one of the most interesting things that came out of this mission was, you know, we're kind of two different tribes. Nongovernmental organizations are down here to do humanitarian assistance and the military with different missions and purposes. But what was remarkable was the paratroopers came down here, broke down a lot of barriers, changed a lot of preconceived notions about what the U.S. military is about. And we worked hand-in-hand and shoulder-to-shoulder with these NGOs. And they are very pleased with the work that we've done.

And I think we -- it was no surprise to me and most people in uniform, but I think it was a surprise to them in how paratroopers could turn so quickly and immerse themselves in humanitarian assistance operation and really see about the needs of the Haitian people to end human suffering and save lives. And that's exactly what they did. That was a very interesting thing to watch unfold. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, and thank you, Chuck. And our fourth blogger did come in. Her name is Julie. But what we're going to do is we're going to go to Dale next, and then Julie, I'll fold you in. So, Dale, please go ahead.

Q Yes, sir. This is Dale again. I noted on the DOD Live blog site and the Army Live that Army chaplains and community have given a half million dollars to Haiti relief. And I'm thinking that a lot of people went back home again and told stories. Do you any specifics down there that I should be telling the American people about how -- you know, good news stories, other than what you've outlined here, like saving lives and ending suffering. That's kind of a broad category. Do you have anything that would be more specific?

COL. MCATEER: You know, the list is -- it's very broad.

It'd be hard to narrow down on one specific human interest story that I could pass to you. And I think of the broad mission that we executed down here. I mean, there are just countless stories anecdotally of how we've gone into certain camps, certain villages, starting on the 13th and delivered aid. The number of evacuations that were done were remarkable.

The work done at the university hospital is probably one of the most compelling stories that we have down there. It's the largest hospital in the Port-au-Prince area. When we arrived there, it was completely overwhelmed with patients. There was a makeshift morgue that had been set up in the area. The medical care that was going on there was described to be as pre-civil war. There were amputations that were occurring with little or no anesthesia. There were crush wounds that were being attended to. And the medical staff there, many of whom had been killed, were completely overwhelmed.

So as we arrived, with some NGOs -- and I don't know exactly which one were down there at the very beginning, but medical volunteers that came in from all over the world, we were able to kind of bring some order to that chaos down there and quickly start seeing to the needs of the people. But that in my mind sticks out probably as the story that was related to me as one of the most significant changes that occurred after -- not just the 82nd, but once the 82nd got into the city, I mean, the environment of the city changed. There was a calmness that started to take hold.

And I think it was just that reassurance that MINUSTAH needed and the government needed that, hey, we're here. We're here to help. We're going to help secure this area. We're going to help get need to the people that require it. And it happened all over the place. And even today, even single day that I walk through the IDP camps and talk to the people, I mean, they're still very, very thankful that we're here, that the international community is here and is committed with the United Nations to see in Haiti through this crisis and then onto the longer-term recovery operations.

So, you know, I could probably pass on through our PAO, pull some of our stories out of my PAO. And I know they post them on DIVITS (ph) pretty regularly some of those personal stories. But the university hospital is probably the one that sticks out the most in my mind, and how we were able to change the dynamic there pretty quickly with our medics, the NGO community and MINUSTAH forces. I mean, everybody came together down there and started to make a real difference.

Q Thank you, sir. I appreciate that. That was great. Thank you for your time today.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale.

Julia passed on the question. I just received an e-mail, so I'll make sure I send you the transcript as specified in that e-mail. So, John, you're the last one. Any further questions before we wrap up today's Blogger Roundtable?

Q Yes. I do have one quick one. Just following up on what you just said, Colonel. Are there any lessons learned yet from this kind of an operation of taking basically, as you said, an organization that's trained for direct assault on a denied area and parachuting in to performing humanitarian duties, you know, is there any presuppositions you had going in that got changed, or do you see anything that -- any doctrine or training that needs to be tweaked when you go back stateside to improve operations in the future, although it sounds like you did a magnificent job when you got there and as you're continuing to work there?

COL. MCATEER: Sure. You know, we pride ourselves as being a learning organization. And I'll focus a little bit at the brigade level. I did say that we -- our primary mission is denied access areas, forcible entries. But also one of our planning missions for the GRF is humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. So it's in our mission set, and we spend a lot of time looking at it.

Interestingly enough, what we've discovered down here is -- you know, we've been at war for about eight years, depending on how you want to count it, and we've been doing counterinsurgency. And the majority of the paratroopers, I'd say over 55, 60 percent of this brigade, have been to Iraq or Afghanistan.

And we've found is, is a lot of the tenets and the TTPs, the tactics, techniques, procedures that we use in counterinsurgency are very applicable here in a humanitarian-assistance type operation. It's about the population. It's about protecting the population and taking care of the population and building a relationship with them.

We don't have that divergent active enemy who's trying to target and kill us, but at the same time, the dealings with the local government, the local security forces, the existing security forces on the ground and the population are very similar to what we've done in the past in Iraq and Afghanistan in a lot of cases. There's obviously a very kinetic side to those operations that we're not executing here, but a

large portion of the coin is applicable here. And it's not that -- so it's not that large of a leap for us cogitatively to shift from forcible entry into a humanitarian assistance operation. Our paratroopers and soldiers across the board have shown incredible restraint. There's always potential for something to go wrong with a security environment. It exists and we're always on guard for that. But what we found is if -- throughout the day is if we engaged the population and as we would in any other environment treat folks the way they want to be treated, the way we would want to be treated, and with -- you know, with some dignity, a little bit of respect there and some order -- you know, there has to be a firm hand in some of these operations, but -- and, you know, we facilitate the delivery of what it is they're looking for in an orderly manner, and we haven't had any issues.

So I'm very proud of the work that the paratroopers have done across the board. It's really a testament. And it's not just the paratroopers. It's all of the soldiers, the sailors, the airmen, the Coast Guardsmen that have been down here. It's remarkable, and it's a great cross-section of what the United States is about. And I believe that we are a cross-section of society, and I think the soldiers and paratroopers down here have been great ambassadors for what the United States is all about. When you take a paratrooper and you can hand out food and water and do it with a smile on your face and treat these people right, it's really good stuff.

Q Thank you. I just wanted to put in a request if there's some way to get some of the numbers. I didn't want to take up time with, you know, the size of the brigade and what -- how many of your people were down there. You've always told us how many are down there now. But if your PAO or someone -- I could get in touch of them just to get all of the crunchy numbers we like to have. I'd appreciate it.

COL. MCATEER: Yeah, we topped out here at just about 3100 for the brigade internal. And we've reduced down to just around 900 right now.

Q Great. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: And John, if there's any follow-on questions you have, please feel free to send it to me and I'll gladly send it on.

Q Okay. Thank you, Lieutenant.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, with that, it draws to a close our roundtable. I want to turn it back over to you, sir, if you'd like to end with any closing thoughts, and we'll wind up today's roundtable. The floor is yours again.

COL. MCATEER: Okay. Well, listen. I really appreciate the opportunity to share a little bit of our story down here. I think the work y'all do is very important, getting out the story of what's been done down here in Haiti and specifically by 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division. So I thank you for your time. I think you can all be justifiably proud of the work that JTF Haiti has done and 2nd of the 82nd

has done down here. We've had a very positive impact, and I think we had a game-changing impact early on in the opening stages, in the initial phases of this operation. And, you know, as I said earlier, things were headed on a very dangerous -- on a dangerous and a huge calamity down here and we were able to turn the tide. The JTF was able to turn the tide. And now I think the conditions are set for MINUSTAH, the international community, the NGO community to look at the long-term recovery.

So in terms of that initial requirement for the brigade, I'd say it was a very successful operation. There's still a ton of work to be done down here in Haiti. That's no secret to anyone. But I do believe that the conditions are right -- if they choose to seize the opportunities, the conditions are right for all of the entities that are here for long-term recovery to have great success.

So on behalf of all of the paratroopers on 2-82, thank you for your time and for taking the time to write a little bit about what it is that we're doing here. All the way.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And just to wrap up, to receive a transcript and also an audio file from today's Bloggers Roundtable, please visit www.dodlive.mil. Click on Bloggers Roundtable, and you'll find a blog posting with all of the other information.

You've been listening to U.S. Army Colonel Tim McAteer. He's the inventory -- infantry -- I can't say that word; I apologize -- commander of 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division. Thank you so much, sir, for participating today. And thank you for the bloggers online. This wraps up today's call. Thank you again.

COL. MCATEER: Thank you very much.

Q Thank you.

Q Thanks a lot.

END.